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New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Maldenov is joining this meeting via video tele-conference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the unfolding events in and around Gaza.

I am afraid that the past two days have seen the most serious escalation since the 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel, and they have shown all of us how close we are to the brink of war every day. Between 28 and 30 May, according to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), 216 projectiles, rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza towards Israel, approximately 77 of which hit areas in the Eshkol, Sha'ar Hanegev and Sdot Negev regions. Although most of the projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, one hit a kindergarten yard at a kibbutz near the Gaza border, and at least one other damaged a house. Thankfully, there were no casualties or serious injuries. In response to the attacks and mortars, the Israeli Air Force carried out strikes on 65 Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza and destroyed a two-kilometre tunnel near the Kerem Shalom crossing. No casualties or serious injuries were reported in Gaza as a result of the strikes.

On 29 May, the Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades and the Islamic Jihad's Sarai Al-Quds claimed joint responsibility for the rockets and mortars fired at Israel. Their joint statement blamed Israel for targeting their fighters and military positions during the preceding 48 hours, cautioned against attempts to dictate new equations on the status quo and warned that they would reciprocate "shelling with shelling and blood with blood". In the meanwhile, Prime Minister Netanyahu vowed that Israel would respond with great force to the rocket attacks, as for more than 24 hours Israeli communities around Gaza lived with the fear of having mere seconds to seek shelter from incoming rockets.

Such attacks are completely unacceptable. The firing of rockets and mortars against civilians cannot be justified under any circumstances. I take this opportunity to call on the international community to join me in unequivocally condemning the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and the dangerous escalation in Gaza. This dangerous escalation comes after a series of warnings by the United Nations and in the context of recent developments on the ground. It cannot be divorced from the context of the two months of protests at the Gaza fence, in which approximately 110 Palestinians were killed and a large number were injured. Throughout this period, militants have also placed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the perimeter fence and attempted, sometimes successfully, to breach it, with the intention of damaging military infrastructure and perpetuating attacks against Israelis.

Particularly in the days following 14 May, several such incidents were filmed and posted on social media, prompting a response by Israel on targets inside Gaza. On 27 May, in response to an IED found by the IDF adjacent to the fence, the IDF targeted a Palestinian Islamic Jihad observation post and killed three members of the group. Islamic Jihad issued a statement vowing to retaliate for what it described as a dangerous escalation. Subsequently, on 28 May, the IDF announced it had fired a tank shell at another observation post, killing a member of the military wing of Hamas. The shelling took place after Israeli troops came under fire, reportedly by Hamas militants, while arresting two Palestinians who had crossed the perimeter fence into Israel. During the night of 28 May, machine-gun fire from Gaza also hit the Israeli city of Sderot, causing

damage to several buildings and a vehicle. The next day, the situation escalated.

Since the early hours of this morning, the situation has quietened down and, since 5 a.m. there have been no projectiles launched from Gaza or any IDF strikes on locations inside the Gaza Strip. In that respect, I welcome the efforts of Egypt aimed at ensuring that calm prevails, and I reiterate my call on all sides to uphold all understandings and prevent the recurrence of any incident that jeopardizes the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

It is imperative that this period of calm be preserved at all costs. No one in Gaza can afford another war. No one has the right to play with the lives of 2 million people who have lived through hell in the past decade. No one should live in fear of an indiscriminate rocket attack. All parties have a responsibility to do their part to de-escalate and to step back from the brink, in the interests of their own people and the future of their own children. As demonstrations and protests in Gaza continue into the month of June, I am concerned that we may experience further violence and additional risks of escalation.

Despite the dangerous escalation, Gaza's civilian infrastructure did not sustain any significant damage as a result of Israeli retaliatory fire yesterday. Moreover, the crossing points for people and goods remained open and functioned normally. The Rafah crossing into Egypt continued operations for the nineteenth consecutive day, and both the Kerem Shalom and the Erez crossings into Israel functioned with only minor delays. Nevertheless, fire from Gaza has caused damage to electricity installations on the Israeli side, resulting in a reduction of more than 30 per cent of the only electricity supply there is to Gaza, and it will take a few days at least to repair that.

As I recently briefed the Council, Gaza's electricity, water and health systems continue to experience unprecedented strain (see S/PV.8265). Egyptian electricity lines have been effectively down since February, and the Gaza power plant has not functioned since April. Today the total supply for Gaza is barely enough to provide three hours of sustained electricity.

Finally, during my briefing to the Council last week, I was greatly encouraged by the willingness of Council members to consider ideas to change the reality in Gaza. Under the current circumstances, failure to act immediately with a set of relatively modest, achievable interventions will only amplify the humanitarian crisis and drastically increase the risk of confrontation. The goals that I outlined last week remain as valid as ever: to prevent a war with potential regional implications, address the urgent humanitarian needs of the population and support Egyptian reconciliation efforts. That means that we need to urgently implement already approved projects, revive efforts to empower the Government to take up its responsibilities and, very important, sustain the 2014 ceasefire understandings on the ground and halt the militant build-up.

The United Nations will move forward on immediately enhancing our capacity and presence to facilitate project implementation in Gaza and improve coordination with Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority in order to overcome political, administrative and logistical blockages. It is important that all sides agree to improve movement and access restrictions and ensure uninterrupted and upgraded water and electricity supply to the population.

This plan is the only sustainable way to ensure that we do not again slide into another devastating conflict, that we do not allow Gaza to become a pawn in somebody else's plans, another tragedy on the already crowded map of regional Middle East conflicts. But I would also like to use this opportunity to send a very clear message to Palestinians in Gaza. We hear their plight, we see their suffering and we will do all that we can to ensure that they have a future beyond mere survival, a future of freedom and development, a future focused on peace and prosperity, where they are the masters of their own fate, a future for all Palestinians, under a single democratic Government, living in a State of Palestine, side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

That is why we need to make sure that calm continues, that the militant build-up ends and that we deny those who want to disrupt peace any opportunity to do so. Without those conditions in place, it will be impossible to move forward on achieving our long-term political and developmental goals. It is high time that we intensify our calls on Israelis and Palestinians to undertake concrete steps that will advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace. Such actions must encompass the overarching political objectives, the unification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority, an end to the occupation and a resolution to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-State

solution and in line with previous agreements and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

This latest round of attacks is a warning. It is a warning to all of us how close to the brink of war we are every single day.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

The United States called this meeting today to talk about the dangerous and destructive activities of the Hamas terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip. One might think that the rest of the Security Council would join us in condemning a terrorist organization like Hamas. There should not be any debate about this. But of course, because this attack involves Israel the standard is different.

The United States drafted a Security Council statement that would have condemned Hamas for launching rockets and endangering civilians. This should have been a no-brainer. One would think no one would want to side with Hamas when it comes to condemning rocket launches, but the statement was blocked. We called for this meeting under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts", but we were blocked again. Apparently, some Council members did not think that Hamas launching rockets qualified as terrorism. The United States begs to differ. We all know that certain actions in and around Gaza receive an enormous amount of attention, both here in the Security Council and throughout the international media. Strangely, other actions do not receive nearly the attention that they deserve.

What happened yesterday is one such action that calls out for attention and condemnation. The facts are clear. On 29 May, Hamas and an allied militant group fired at least 70 rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel. That rocket attack was indiscriminate, aiming to cause as much civilian death and destruction as possible. There were several injuries but, thank goodness, there were no deaths. But the mere fact that one of the rockets landed on a kindergarten playground is all the proof we need of the intentions of the terrorists. The horrifying damage that could have been done is unthinkable.

Unlike some situations we deal with here in the Security Council, where guilty parties claim mistaken identity or lack of evidence of responsibility, this is clearly not the case. Hamas openly claims responsibility for that attack. They do so proudly. Their only regret is that the attack did not kill anyone. The Security Council has always been quick to pounce on Israel, regardless of the facts or the circumstances. I am very interested in how my colleagues respond when the attacks are directly against Israel. These attacks are a clear escalation of violence and take no steps whatsoever to protect against civilian casualties. In fact, the entire desired outcome of the attacks is to maximize civilian casualties. There are a couple of major conclusions to be drawn from that disconnect.

First, this outrageous terrorist attack proves what we have consistently maintained, namely, that the stated purpose of Hamas is the destruction of Israel. That is its purpose when it fires rockets into Israel. That is its purpose when it builds terror tunnels underneath Israeli territory. And that is its purpose when it orchestrates violent protests and riots at the boundary fence, calling for a march for return. All of those acts are indivisible parts of a single strategy. That strategy is to do as much damage as possible to Israel and to provoke a response in self-defence that will create international condemnation of Israeli actions.

Secondly, the actions of Hamas prove the falsehood of the idea that the people of Gaza require international protection. The people of Gaza do not need protection from an external source. The people of Gaza need protection from Hamas. It is the actions of Hamas that are putting Gazans in grave danger. The indiscriminate attacks by Hamas against Israel inevitably bring about a response. As I have asked my colleagues before, I will ask them again today: Who among us would accept 70 rockets launched into their country? We all know the answer to that question: no one would.

The Palestinian people of Gaza are facing desperate humanitarian hardships. We want to help address their needs. We support Special Coordinator Mladenov's engagement to restart initiatives that could improve conditions in Gaza. But here again, we must look at the destructive actions of Hamas. In recent weeks, Hamas militants have repeatedly assaulted the Kerem Shalom border crossing — the biggest lifeline for basic humanitarian goods into Gaza. In its attacks yesterday, Hamas rockets damaged three power lines, knocking out electric power to tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Those monstrous actions demonstrate complete disregard for the people of Gaza. Apparently, it is not enough for Hamas to incite military responses to its acts of terrorism. Hamas also feels compelled to increase the suffering of the people in Gaza. We note reports today that Hamas has unilaterally declared a ceasefire. We hope that the ceasefire holds and that there are no more rocket attacks. But the fact that Hamas can even declare a ceasefire is further confirmation of its responsibility for those attacks in the first place.

When we consider the situation in Gaza, this is what the Security Council should address. It is outrageous for the Security Council to fail to condemn Hamas rocket attacks against Israeli civilians while the Human Rights Council approves sending a team to investigate Israeli actions taken in self-defence. I urge the members of the Security Council to exercise at least as much scrutiny when it comes to the actions of the Hamas terrorist group as it does to Israel's legitimate right of self-defence. To allow Hamas to continue to get away with its terrorist acts and to somehow expect Israel to sit on its hands when it is attacked is the height of hypocrisy. To continue to condemn Israel without even acknowledging what is actually coming from the leaders of Gaza makes me question who actually cares about the welfare of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people deserve a better life. That can happen only if we acknowledge and reject the terrorist actions of Hamas and if we encourage more responsible Palestinian leadership. All responsible parties should be encouraging both sides to come to the negotiating table for the well-being of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Coordinator for his very sobering briefing.

Echoing Ambassador Haley's concern, I condemn — without qualification and in the strongest terms — yesterday's mortar and rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians are unacceptable and they are unjustifiable. Those who risk killing or injuring children are heinous. The attacks cannot be ignored by the Security Council. The United Kingdom fully supports Israel's right to self-defence and the right to defend its citizens from such acts of terror.

The recent spike in rocket attacks from Gaza is a stark reminder that the risk of a renewed conflict is very much present, and I think the Special Coordinator brought that out very clearly in his briefing today. The latest attacks follow the deaths of more than 100 Palestinian in recent weeks of protests, and the Council has addressed that previously. Civilians live in fear and in despair. Further escalation of violence risks a devastating effect on efforts to restore the peace process and can bring about only renewed suffering to the region. As Council members, we should act to ensure that does not come to fruition.

The situation in Gaza in undeniably dangerous. It is sad and it is complex. The perpetual cycle of violence needs to end and serves no one's interests. The actions of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad represent a real and concerning threat to Israeli security. Ultimately, the ongoing decisions of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to embrace violence and reject the Quartet principles lie at the heart of the Gaza situation.

We should use this Council meeting today to demand that Hamas and other terrorist groups cease all violent and provocative actions, and cease any and all actions that put civilian lives at risk. At the same time, we do not ignore the significant contribution that restrictions on movement and access imposed on Gaza have on the dire humanitarian situation that we witness.

The United Kingdom continues its support for the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, and we encourage further progress on reconciliation. An end to this violence requires a tangible path for changing Gaza, and what the Special Coordinator had to say about the plan was very interesting. We believe that it is the responsibility of the international community to work together to find a way to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Gaza. We welcome the proposals that Mr. Mladenov made, which include commitments to advance urgent infrastructure and economic development projects, improve access and movement and support the Egyptian-led reconciliation process.

We stand ready as the United Kingdom to do everything that we can to support those efforts. The people of Gaza are in urgent and desperate need. Yesterday, my Government committed to providing a new package of over $2 million of life-saving support. The funding will support work by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society in keeping hospitals open and functioning at a time when the health-care system in Gaza is under huge strain.

Ultimately, peace will come only through fresh negotiations between the parties, supported by the international community. Every day makes it more critical that both Israelis and Palestinians return to direct negotiations and urgently prioritize steps to resolve the situation in Gaza. That is the only way that we will be able to achieve the two-State solution and a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. Those who seek to undermine that, including through unjustified acts of violence, deserve the rightful condemnation of the Council, as well as of the whole world.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his precise briefing and commitment, which is more necessary than ever. I will be brief. We have had an opportunity to speak several times on the situation in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian question over the past few weeks. I will keep to three points, namely, the escalation of the situation over the past few days in Gaza, the ongoing protests in the Gaza Strip during recent weeks, which are part of a structural crisis, and the responsibility of the Security Council in the face of that situation.

First, for several weeks now, we have alerted the Council to the risk of an escalation in the situation in the Gaza Strip, which is not tenable in the long-term. As yesterday showed once again, there is a real risk of a cycle of violence, of which the players in question could quickly lose control. After three conflicts in the past decade, the situation is sadly predictable, and the same causes are still producing the same tragic effects in the Gaza Strip. On 29 May alone, almost 30 rockets were fired into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip — an unprecedented number since the conflict of 2014. Those rocket launches deliberately targeted civilians. They are unacceptable. Regardless of the perpetrators, France condemns them without any ambiguity whatsoever. I would like to recall France's tireless commitment to Israel's security. Beyond that, the context is very tense, and we therefore call for restraint. The issue here is to try to avoid a new fatal conflict in Gaza, where once again it would be the civilians paying the price.

Secondly, I would like to underline that the armed escalation comes at the end of two months of violence and repression carried out by the Israeli armed forces against Palestinian protesters in Gaza, and 14 May marked its highpoint. With more than 116 dead thus far, 60 on that day alone, and more than 12,000 people injured, including 4,000 by live ammunition, the figures of the past few weeks are all the more tragic because they could have largely been avoided.

We have said it before, that result is directly linked to an indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army, facilitated by extremely permissive rules of engagement, which we have condemned. Israel is a democracy and should respect the right to peaceably protest. As an occupying Power, it should furthermore respect the obligations for protection that are incumbent upon it. Similarly, we have called for those protests to remain peaceful, and we have warned those, first and foremost Hamas, who have tried to instrumentalize those protests for political or military ends.

An acute crisis exists in Gaza, which we can all see and which serves to highlight the vulnerability of the civilian population against the backdrop of a structural humanitarian and political crisis, anchored in a decade of the Israeli blockade and exacerbated by the impasse in the reconciliation process. The protests over recent weeks cannot be dissociated from the despair of the inhabitants of Gaza. We will not be able to address that crisis without restoring the dignity and renewing a sense of hope for the future of that population, of which more than half is under 18-years-old.

In that regard, we commend the essential work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the Gaza Strip. The Agency is one of the last safety nets to avert the collapse of Gaza's, two thirds of which is made up of Palestinian refugees. UNRWA requires increased financial support from the international community, given the frozen American contribution. With iin mind, the donor conference to be held on 25 June will be crucial. Any good will that is expressed will be important and appreciated. We once again call on our American friends to not turn their backs on their historic role of supporting UNRWA, which is more than ever key to regional stability.

Finally, beyond the immediate de-escalation that is required and the urgent humanitarian response, we need a long-term response to the issues in Gaza. Such response is essential for the population of Gaza and for regional stability, both of which are being addressed by the plan undertaken by Nickolay Mladenov. The Special Coordinator has all of our support in defining priority projects, in particular for infrastructure. Furthermore, we support his proposals to strengthen

project management within the United Nations in Gaza and dialogue with Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority. As we have said, those proposals should include immediate measures to ease restrictions on the movement of goods and persons. Ultimately, our objective should be to lift the blockade, while respecting Israel's security concerns. Furthermore, Mr. Mladenov's proposals should be supported by specific approaches to resuming the reconciliation process. In political terms, our horizon should be the re-establishment of all of the prerogatives of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

Thirdly, I will conclude by underlining once again the responsibility that is incumbent upon the Council — it bears the principal role of upholding peace and security, which is set forth by the Charter of the United Nations, but it also has a particular role to play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, of which it has defined the main parameters over several decades to resolve the conflict, although unilateral action has recently rendered them fragile.

Gaza has been approaching collapse in the past few months, while it has been in the grip of violence for several weeks. It is on the verge of a new conflict, and yet the Council remains silent. With gravity, I say to those present that such silence weighs more and more heavily, it is increasingly deafening and it is not acceptable. It is unacceptable for the populations of both Palestine and Israel, who were the first ones affected by the conflict. It is unacceptable for the world, which is watching us and sees in that silence not only a sign of impotence but, worse, also a reason for mistrust. That is unacceptable for the credibility of the Council and for our collective action, which is at stake.

The Security Council cannot abdicate its responsibilities on this matter. France has been ready to engage in a constructive discussion on all draft texts that have been presented to Council members over the past few months and up to today, without exception. We have been given a new opportunity to overcome our silence by engaging in an open, but demanding, way in the discussion on the draft resolution submitted by Kuwait. The text has already been extensively improved. A number of aspects still require clarification and nuance, and we intend to continue to play our part in arriving at a text that is capable of garnering broad support within the Council. I invite everyone to commit to the same approach. Once again, it is a question of our collective responsibility.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing on the recent developments in the Gaza Strip and the most recent developments in the occupied territories. We commend his endeavours and underscore our full support for his efforts. We also thank the delegation of the United States for calling this meeting to discuss the situation in the occupied territories — a situation that continues to deteriorate in the light of the ongoing oppressive practices of the Israeli occupying power. We reiterate our firm and principled position related to the condemnation of targeting civilians by any party anywhere and at any time.

The Israeli occupying power bears full responsibility for the most recent escalation in the occupied territories. For as long that occupation continues, the Palestinian people have the legitimate right to fight it and defend their aspirations and dreams of independence and a life of freedom and dignity. We support their fight and commend their steadfastness in the face of the destructive Israeli machine.

The Israeli policies and practices in the occupied territories cannot be justified. The occupation in itself is a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. It must end, as it is the root cause of the problem and the conflict in the region. It is unacceptable that the international community remains silent and inactive in the face of recurrent Israeli violations in the occupied territories, contrary to international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The occupation continues, even though the international community has condemned it and the Security Council called for it to cease in resolution 2334 (2016). Arrests continue to be carried out, along with the seizure of land and the destruction of houses. The occupation proceeds systematically, even though it has been condemned by the world as inhumane.

Moreover, illegal unilateral measures that seek the Judaization of Jerusalem and changing its demographic composition, character and religious sanctity continue. Recurrent incursions by settlers and occupying forces into Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem every now and then continue to provoke Muslims. The blockade on Gaza has gone on for over 10 years. It is a repressive blockade

of nearly 2 million people. The occupying power did not respect its obligations in accordance with international law and did not heed the call to lift restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods and to open border crossings in Gaza amid deterioration in the economic and living conditions. That has led to more suffering for the Palestinian people, which has generated widespread despair.

In the past few weeks, Israel, the occupying power, has used live ammunition and shot at civilian protesters who came out to peacefully revive the Great March of Return. As a result of that, more than 120 martyrs fell, including some children. Thousands were wounded and some were permanently disabled. We have submittted three draft statements to the press expressing our concern, given the death of those victims, and affirming their right to protest peacefully. We also called for a transparent and independent investigation into that massacre. However, all those press statements were rejected.

Therefore, the State of Kuwait has submitted a draft resolution to provide international protection to the Palestinian people, because they are the ones who deserve protection and not the occupying Power, which claims that it is defending itself while it possesses a huge and sophisticated arsenal that it uses excessively against defenceless people under occupation. The State of Kuwait has ensured transparency and inclusiveness in the negotiations on the draft resolution and has taken into account many of the proposed amendments. We hope that the draft resolution will be adopted by the Security Council so that a message can be sent to the Palestinian people that the international community, represented by the Security Council, will do them justice and stand by their side in their plight, and that it will do its utmost and shoulder its responsibility to help them recover their legitimate rights, and that long-awaited justice will finally be served.

In that regard, we welcome the resolution of the Human Rights Council adopted on 18 May in relation to urgently deploying an investigative team to the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, to investigate all Israeli violations.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait supports the choice of peace because it is the strategic option, as underscored in resolutions of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and many conferences. Our objective is to establish comprehensive, just and sustainable peace, based on internationally legitimate resolutions and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of land for peace, the Quarted road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That objective should lead to Israel's withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 4 June 1967, so as to ensure that the Palestinian people achieve all their legitimate political rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their territory with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

We note with regret that in addition to the tragic events of recent days in the occupied Palestinian territories, on 29 May there was once again a sharp escalation in armed activity on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Fighters fired on settlements in Israeli territory. The Israeli air force retaliated with missile strikes. It is worrisome that the parties are increasingly resorting to violence, constantly deepening their distrust and making the possibility of relaunching the peace process an ever more distant prospect. The civilians of Israel and Palestine are becoming hostages to this developing situation.

We believe that relying on force and rejecting direct dialogue represent a road to nowhere. That relates not only to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but to any other crisis situation. We call on all parties to exercise restraint. We have repeatedly said that the trend to increasing destabilization in the occupied Palestinian territories is directly connected to the impasse in the political process. The Middle East settlement, unresolved for so long, is in a stalemate, and instead of tackling its fundamental issues, the Security Council has been compelled to address the undesirable consequences of the impasse. That approach is not productive, to put it mildly, and will not enable us to overcome the massive deterioration in the situation, which is certainly in nobody's interest. Nor will it help us to address the chronic problems of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as provocative rhetoric, unilateral actions, outbreaks of violence and settlement activities.

It will be crucial to mobilize efforts to resume the political process between Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of the well-known international law on the subject, including the decisions of the Security Council and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, the outcome of which should be the implementation of a two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Our position on the demonstrations in Gaza remains unchanged. We affirm the right to peaceful protest action and firmly condemn the indiscriminate use of force against civilians and the firing of rockets into Israeli territory. We call on the parties to refrain from steps that could lead to further deterioration of the situation. It will be important to continue intensive efforts to ease the difficult humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The continuing hopelessness of the situation plays into the hands of forces with an interest in further radicalizing the situation. Widespread despair is a fertile breeding ground for extremism. In that connection, we note the important work being done by the United Nations and particularly by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the occupied Palestinian territories. We welcome and support the involvement of regional actors in the Middle East peace process. We commend Egypt and Jordan for the role they have been playing in Palestinian affairs.

In conclusion, we would like to underscore that the direction of the developments in the situation on the occupied Palestinian territories once again confirms that the international community does not have the right to ignore Palestine while addressing other problems in the Middle East. We must act. In our view, the Middle East Quartet is the appropriate and necessary forum, as endorsed by Security Council resolutions, for ending the impasse in the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

China closely follows the current tensions in Palestine and is particularly concerned about the risk of a potential escalation of conflict in Gaza. We hope that the relevant actors, Israel and Palestine, will remain calm, exercise restraint, work towards the same goals, cease military action and take concrete measures in order to achieve progress in de-escalation. China has continued to call for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute through peaceful negotiations. China opposes all violence, which leads to a deterioration of the situation and targets civilians.

The Security Council and the relevant parties should aim to achieve peace and tranquillity and strive to create the necessary conditions for stabilizing the situation and resuming dialogue. China's Special Envoy on the Middle East issue paid a recent visit to Palestine and Israel and met with Special Coordinator Mladenov. The two sides held an in-depth exchange of views on the Palestinian question, in particular the current situation in Gaza, and conveyed the importance of ongoing progress in the Middle East peace process.

The Palestinian question is at the core of the situation in the Middle East. It is an underlying issue for the attainment of peace in the region. Under the current circumstances, the long-delayed resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel is highly urgent and necessary. The international community should do its utmost to promote the resumption of talks and reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution as soon as possible. That is the only way to achieve peace between Palestine and Israel and to guarantee stability and security in Gaza. The international community should continue to uphold the two-State solution, work in accordance with the existing international consensus, including relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative and play a constructive role in the political settlement of the Palestinian question.

I would like to reiterate the fact that China has always been committed to promoting the Middle East peace process and supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights. China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will continue to follow President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal for the promotion of a political settlement of the Palestinian question, work together with all the parties concerned in the international community and play a positive and constructive role in the achievement of peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his pertinent briefing. We very much welcome his commitment to addressing the volatile situation and contributing to a de-escalation of violence.

I would like to begin by expressing deep regret about the violence and about the large number of people who have been killed and injured over the past few weeks. Sweden condemns yesterday's indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian militants from Gaza towards Israel. Such attacks are unacceptable and must stop immediately. We note that at least one of the rockets fell in the vicinity of a kindergarten. As we have clearly stated in the Chamber, children must never be the target of violence, be put at risk or encouraged to participate in violence.

Yesterday's attack did not take place in a vacuum. Since 30 March the Council has been seized repeatedly of the violence in and around Gaza. As we all know, Gaza is on the verge of social and economic collapse. We must urgently address the humanitarian crisis and alleviate the suffering of its people. Just last week, we welcomed proposals to that end. We encourage efforts to take such measures forward with renewed urgency and determination.

It is important to prioritize initiatives that have immediate positive effects on the daily lives of Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a critical role in providing fundamental services, such as health and education, thereby contributing to stability in the egion. It must receive needed urgent political and financial support from us all. In words and deeds, Sweden has repeatedly encouraged and called for a remedy to UNRWA's financial crisis, .

We also underline the importance of unimpeded access to Gaza for all humanitarian actors. It is crucial that our humanitarian support contribute to increased intra-Palestinian unity. It is therefore high time to end the policy of closure in Gaza. While fully understanding the legitimate security concerns of Israel, Palestine and Egypt, we repeat our call for the lifting of restrictions and full and sustained access and movement. We welcome Egypt's opening of the Rafah crossing point during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as Egypt's efforts towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Yesterday's developments occurred at a sensitive time. Once again we urge all parties to act with the utmost restraint to prevent loss of life and protect civilians, in particular children, ensure that all measures taken are proportionate and take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation and break the cycle of violence. We welcome the fact that the attacks and retaliation appear to have ended, at least for now.

The Council has the responsibility to contribute to de-escalation in Gaza. As many others around the table have said today, we regret that the Council has not been able to agree on public statements relating to the situation. The Council must come together to address the crisis and more broadely engage in efforts to advance the peace process and the two-State solution. We thank the Kuwaiti delegation for the draft resolution, which includes a call for measures for improving the situation for civilians in Palestine, including the establishment of a mechanism for that purpose. We hope for constructive engagement by everyone on the draft resolution.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing.

We have been following reports of escalating violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and of events taking place in Gaza, about which we are very concerned. It has been just two weeks since the emergency Security Council meeting (see S/PV.8256) following the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, which left many Palestinians dead and injured in the Gaza protest. At that meeting we expressed our seeped sorrow and sympathy on the loss of life. While we called on Israel to show maximum restraint, we also stated that Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations had a responsibility to prevent all violent actions and provocations. I would like to echo what the Special Coordinator said yesterday, to the effect that he was deeply concerned by the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian militants from Gaza towards southern Israel. He also said that such attacks were unacceptable and undermined the serious efforts made by the international community to improve the situation in Gaza. His statement, which we feel is most valid, highlights how dangerous the rocket attacks from Gaza are and the hindrance they cause to making progress in the peace process. This must stop, for they are in the interest of no one, least of all the Palestinians.

Under these circumstances, it is impossible to deny Israel the right to self-defence, a right that goes along with a responsibility to ensure proportionality. We in the Council have repeatedly said that any negative action that runs counter to a peaceful settlement of the conflict will only prolong the process of resolving the problem. It is therefore self-evident that unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying

problems solved peacefully, the tragedy at hand will only happen again and again, eventually reaching the point of no return. That is where we seem to be headed. The situation is that grave, and much worse violence is becoming imminent, despite the current calm situation. This is part and parcel of the very logic of the situation, and that is why preserving the possibility of finding a solution through a two-State formula is critical. That is also why a de-escalation of this dangerous situation remains critical, so as to protect civilians, break the cycle of violence and resume the much-needed political process.

We appreciate the role played by Egypt in trying to de-escalate the situation, and we note that today the ceasefire appears to be holding. This could calm the situation for a while, but to resume the political process, the parties, as well as the international community, have their own, respective responsibilities. While the parties should show the flexibility to engage in direct and meaningful negotiations so as to reach a final settlement on all issues, the international community, in particular the Council, should discharge its responsibilities in helping and encouraging the two parties to do so.

In conclusion, let me say that it is very important to get the narrative right. It would not be right to lose sight of the root causes of this tragic and potentially extremely dangerous situation. The possibility of a two-State solution is shrinking by the day, to the frustration of the Palestinians, whose living conditions, particularly in Gaza, are deeply worrying indeed. As Mr. Mladenov said recently, at one point weeks ago Gaza was on the verge of total collapse, with all the attendant consequences. He reiterated that view today. That situation is conducive to the creation of groups of all stripes that would pose a threat not only to the peoples of Palestine and Israel but also to the region as the whole. That is why the resumption of the peace process is so critical and why there is no other option for saving the possibility of the two-State solution.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for having convened this emergency meeting. Our thanks go also to Mr. Mladenov for his in-depth briefing.

Peru notes with deep alarm and deplores the recent launching of rockets and mortar shells against Israeli urban centres by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, one of which struck the yard of a kindergarten. We condemn any attack against civilians while also recognizing Israel's right to guarantee its own security and to deploy legitimate defence measures, in line with the principles of proportionality, precaution and legality.

We are alarmed also by the bleak outlook for the situation in the short and medium term and the exacerbation of inflammatory rhetoric in the wake of the acts of violence and terror over the past few days and the deaths of Palestinians that occurred in Gaza over the past few weeks. In that context, we would like to commend the Egyptian efforts to bring about a de-escalation and a ceasefire. We believe that it is necessary that all parties act cautiously and with restraint, and adhere strictly to international humanitarian and human rights law. The Council, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, must ensure the proper levels of accountability for the violations that have occurred.

We deem it regrettable that, faced with the undeniable deterioration of the situation, the Council has not thus far been able to achieve the minimum consensus needed for this body to speak out and to define the actions that need to be taken, including the need to address the root causes of the conflict and the urgent need to alleviate the tragic humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Peru will continue to work constructively to protect civilians on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to promote the resumption of a political dialogue that will allow us to put an end to this spiral of violence and to rekindle the negotiations required in order to achieve a two-State solution with secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his update on the latest developments and would like to make the following observations.

Kazakhstan condemns the rocket firings from Gaza towards Israel on 29 May, which further erode prospects for peace. We have followed with the utmost concern reports of the overnight missile launches from Gaza targeting Israeli positions, including the site where a mortar shell from Gaza hit a kindergarten in southern Israel, near the border with the Strip.

We want to make it clear that such attacks can cause lasting damage to the peace process in several different ways. We agree that the uncertainty and volatility of the current environment are hardening diverse positions

and sharpening the rhetoric on all sides, which may well play into the hands of extremists. Astana urges an immediate halt to all hostile acts and provocative actions in order to avert a fresh conflagration in the region, which is already embroiled in brutal conflicts, resulting in the immense suffering of civilians. We must prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of Israelis and Palestinians and urge both sides to exercise maximum restraint and abide by their obligations under the relevant United Nations and international conventions and resolutions on the protection of civilians.

Both sides and the international community must consolidate our collective efforts for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. We should ensure that words are translated into concrete action. My country also underscores the importance of intra-Palestinian unity, so as to bring all factions together and unite them under a legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority.

My delegation also appreciates the efforts of the Russian Federation and Egypt to ensure intra-Palestinian consolidation and urge all Palestinian political parties and movements to integrate into one national political structure. It is critical that the Palestine Liberation Organization take control of the Gaza Strip.

Kazakhstan calls upon the Middle East Quartet — the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations — to intensify its efforts to resume negotiations, with a view to defining mutual borders and the principle of the peaceful coexistence of two States on the basis of international law and Security Council resolutions.

We note that the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza, which further contributes to instability and frustration, could lead to a resumption of conflict and an increase in terrorist activities. We therefore urge the official authorities of Israel and Palestine to help resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. At present, the nearly 2 million Palestinian residents of Gaza, more than half of whom are children, live in dire conditions that are deteriorating daily. The future of the sector's young people is being shaped today, and we are afraid that it is not the future that Palestinians or Israelis or anyone of us in the international community would want to see. It is clear that we need confidence-building measures in the economic area, with the support of the international community, for durable peace and stability to take hold.

Finally, Kazakhstan supports the proposals of Nickolay Mladenov and, as always, stands for the early resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation process, especially in a bilateral format, of a two-State solution. The immediate start of the deliberations and, as a result, the speedy implementation of agreements will allow us to solve the problem of confidence deficits. It will also enable us to move to a more open dialogue between the two sides upon mutually identified issues. Only steps such as these can bring us closer to the goals we have set for ourselves.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his insightful briefing.

After the tragic events linked to the March of Return, the Gaza Strip is once again the scene of violent clashes, following a series of Israeli strikes carried out in reprisal for dozens of mortars and rockets fired at Israel from the Palestinian enclave. My delegation remains deeply concerned about this new cycle of violence, which threatens to plunge the entire region into chaos. We unreservedly condemn these acts of violence and call on the various parties to agree to an immediate and lasting ceasefire. My country also urges the parties to the conflict to engage in a constructive dialogue to find a political solution to a crisis that has shaken the region for decades.

Côte d'Ivoire cannot say it enough: there is no alternative to peace, any more than there can be a military solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its principled position that only credible dialogue and political negotiations between the parties will lead to a viable solution for the two States living side by side in peace and security, based on the mutual recognition of the legitimate rights of both parties. My delegation therefore urges the international community to continue, without respite, its mediation efforts in the context of the resumption of the political process between the two parties, with a view to making the two-State solution a tangible reality, in the best interests of the Israeli and Palestinian populations.

My delegation deplores the lack of political prospects in the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are particularly concerned about the outbreak of violence that we are unfortunately witnessing in the Gaza Strip, which is largely sustained by a difficult economic and humanitarian situation, heavily affected

by the blockade in force, youth unemployment and various shortages of water, electricity and medicines. It is therefore important that the international community intensify its efforts to implement projects and concrete measures to improve the humanitarian situation, but also the economic development of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, this situation also highlights the need to continue the inter-Palestinian dialogue for the implementation of the reconciliation agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October 2017 between Hamas and Fatah. That will allow the effective return of the Palestinian Authority to, and its full control of, the Gaza Strip to better address the humanitarian and security needs of the people.

In conclusion, my delegation fully supports the objective of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and reiterates its readiness to work with all Council members towards a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. We reiterate our call to the parties to refrain from any act of violence that would have the effect of removing any hope of a peaceful resolution of a conflict that has lasted too long.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Bolivia wishes to thank Mr. Mladenov not only for his briefing but also for his active work in such a difficult and complex situation. In addition, we thank the delegation of the United States for having called for today's meeting. We believe that the situation in Palestine is a priority issue — and it should be one — for the Security Council, and I believe that we have not had enough meetings, and certainly not enough results, on it.

Consistent with its pacifist policy, Bolivia categorically condemns attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in all their forms and manifestations as unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed. Bolivia also welcomes the efforts made by Egypt to seek a ceasefire in Gaza. We call on the Government of Israel to act accordingly and desist from its decision to continue the bombing and air raids.

As several members of the Council already stated, this situation does not exist in a vacuum. The latest escalation of violence that we are witnessing only contributes to an intensification of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. More than 2 million Palestinians continue to live without access to basic services, with power cuts lasting more than 22 hours, overcrowded hospitals and congestion in the delivery of health care, lack of medicines and a shortage of water for human consumption, inter alia, as a result of 11 years of a systematic blockade by sea, 11 years of a systematic siege by land and 11 years of being prevented from returning to their homes.

As the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to comply fully and scrupulously with its legal obligations under international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Fourth Geneva Convention, to resume without further delay the opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons. In that regard, we demand that the parties comply with and respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including on the protection of civilians. We therefore call on the membership of the Security Council to support the draft resolution proposed by the Kuwaiti delegation, which aims to adopt appropriate measures to guarantee the security, well-being and protection of civilians.

We note with great concern that the atmosphere of violence in the region has so alarmingly deteriorated in recent weeks. Mr. Mladenov has constantly and repeatedly warned the Security Council that we are on the verge of a clash with unpredictable consequences. This is of course aggravated by the unilateral decision of the Government of the United States of America to move its Embassy to Jerusalem in violation of various rules of international law. For those who have forgotten, the last flare-up in Gaza, in 2014, resulted in the deaths of 1,462 Palestinian civilians, of whom 551 were children, and 11,200 Palestinians injured, of whom 3,400 were children. That is to say that if we do not remember what happened, we are doomed to repeat its bitter reality.

We reiterate once again our rejection of Israeli settlement plans and their expansionist policies as being in open violation of resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories. Accordingly, we wish to state once again that the root cause of the situation in the occupied territories in Palestine, which of course is worth repeating, is the illegal Israeli occupation of the territories. We reaffirm our conviction that the only long-term solution is the two-State solution, in which a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State is finally built, within the pre-1967 international borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Mr. Mladenov for his accurate briefing and dedicated work in very challenging circumstances.

As Mr. Mladenov said, yesterday's events once again show the great the risk of escalation in the absence of progress in the political, economic, humanitarian dimensions. The current situation is simply not sustainable. In that context, I will focus on three issues — first, yesterday's escalation; secondly, the crisis in Gaza; and, thirdly, developments in the West Bank.

On my first point, the escalation we witnessed yesterday, in the early hours of 29 May, Palestinian terrorist groups fired rockets and mortars towards Israel. Those rockets and mortars landed in civilian areas, one of them in the playground of a kindergarten, as others have already indicated. Luckily, no one got hurt. The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns these indiscriminate attacks from Gaza into Israel. As our Swedish colleague just said, these attacks are unacceptable and must stop immediately. The rocket and mortar attacks were the beginning of a day of attacks and counter-attacks — the heaviest since the hostilities in 2014.

Yesterday's events showed again how fragile the situation is and how quickly things can spiral out of control. Yesterday's events followed weeks of protests, with more protests announced. We must prevent new and further escalation. We once again call on all parties to exercise restraint and to prevent incidents that would put the lives of both Palestinians and Israeli civilians at risk. Civilians on both sides of the fence on the Gaza border should not have to live in fear.

That brings me to my second point, the crisis in Gaza, which has been discussed recently in the Chamber on several occasions. We welcome the consensus in the Council that the situation is most concerning and needs to be addressed. Now the challenge before us is to come to consensus on how the Council should act.

We welcome the initiative taken by Mr. Mladenov to come up with a plan to fast-track urgently needed projects for water, energy and health. For that approach to succeed, the combined effort of the international community and the cooperation of all parties is needed. Crises should not be treated as an excuse to delay further action. On the contrary, they are an extra reason to redouble efforts to improve living conditions on the ground.

In that regard, we reiterate our support for an appropriate public statement by the Council on the current crisis. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the initiatives taken by members to address parts of the puzzle. We thank Kuwait in particular for its efforts in that regard. We should be able to come to a statement that does justice to our shared concerns.

A sustainable political solution is needed to the humanitarian crisis for the security of Palestinian and Israeli civilians. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the Egyptian initiatives to achieve a return of the Palestinian Authority as the legitimate Government in Gaza, and we welcome Egypt's constructive role in maintaining calm between the parties.

That brings me to my third point, on the worrisome developments in the West Bank. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply concerned by the intention of the Israeli authorities to enforce the demolition of all structures in the Khan Al-Ahmar community. The Kingdom of the Netherlands stresses that Area C is of critical importance for the viability of a future Palestinian State in the context of the two-State solution. We recall that demolitions and confiscations of homes and humanitarian assets and the obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian assistance are contrary to Israel's obligations under international law.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the announced plans to approve new settlement expansion. The continued Israeli settlement activity is illegal under international law. It remains an obstacle to peace, as reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016).

In conclusion, this week has shown that on both sides steps are taken that undermine the viability of the two-State solution. This week's events are an alarming reminder that the current status quo is unsustainable. We call upon all parties to reverse these trends and to take positive steps that contribute to the possibility of sustainable peace. We call upon all parties to make the two-State solution possible.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the United States for having requested this important meeting. We also express our appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Equatorial Guinea has been monitoring with great concern the escalation of violence and rhetoric in the region. We condemn all violence by any actors. We

condemn and deem any attack against civilians — in any form — unacceptable and reprehensible.

In that connection, Equatorial Guinea welcomes the efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt to mediate the tension that has arisen between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip. We regret that, despite the repeated appeal of the members of the Security Council, the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as other actors of the international community, we must meet again today for the same acts of violence.

Today, as we have done for the past two weeks, we are discussing violence in Gaza. Last week, Mr. Mladenov alerted us of the possibility of Gaza collapsing. Regrettably, we are now confronting exchanges of attacks between the parties, rather than brokering a solution to the situation.

My delegation yet again calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to refrain from acts that could aggravate the already complex situation. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea always advocates for a negotiated solution to any conflict or problem that may arise, however difficult and complicated it may be. The position of our Government in this case is no different. Therefore, we invite the parties to do their best to normalize the situation and to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population.

It is critical to ease the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We also believe it is important and call upon Palestinians to honour the reconciliation pact. If that had occurred, the Palestinian Authority would already control the Gaza Strip. We also call upon the Israeli authorities to use proportionate force in their legitimate self-defence.

In conclusion, I reaffirm our position, based on the standards and principles of international law, Security Council resolutions, the declarations of the African Union and the Arab Peace Initiative, which refer to the solution of two independent States — one Israeli and the other Palestinian — living in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. We believe that Israelis, Palestinians and any just mediator must respect such results. We therefore urge the international community to continue its efforts to restart dialogue between the parties and to avoid actions that could undermine the peaceful coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

At the outset, let me thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, for his account of the latest developments on the ground. Poland condemns in the strongest terms the rocket attacks targeting the civilian communities in southern Israel, carried out by militant groups from the Gaza Strip. There is no justification under any circumstances for indiscriminate and deliberate acts of violence against the civilian population. They are unacceptable. They must stop and never be repeated again. Both Israelis and Palestinians have a right to live in peace and safety.

We concur with Special Coordinator Mladenov that such attacks undermine the efforts to improve the situation in Gaza. We strongly urge the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any actions that may lead to a further escalation of the situation and may endanger the safety of civilians.

We call upon all actors to ensure the protection of civilians, particularly children. In that respect, we reiterate our appeal to all parties to strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I want to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. We would also like to thank the many Council members who have on principle defended the truth and demonstrated that they have memories extending beyond the past 24 hours.

Time and time again we have come to the Security Council to appeal to its members to act with responsibility, in line with their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the Council's own numerous resolutions, to address the dire situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Today is no different, as we continue to face a protracted and deepening protection crisis, a human rights crisis and a justice crisis and their devastating impact on our people.

We come again to this Chamber two weeks following the 14 May massacre by Israel, the occupying Power, against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip

and following a barrage of Israeli military strikes against Gaza in the past 24 hours that have heightened tensions and are a cause for alarm, creating even greater urgency to reign in Israel's warmongering and defuse the current crisis.

Faced with the potential of yet another act of savage Israeli aggression against the occupied, besieged and blockaded Gaza Strip, we must make the same appeal we made two weeks ago (see S/PV.8256) and at all prior junctures: we urge the Council to act now to de-escalate this dangerous situation, to avert a descent into more violence and chaos and to prevent the occupying Power from further terrorizing the Palestinian civilian population and endangering innocent civilian lives.

Once again, we plead with the Council to act to save civilian lives and to respond to such threats to international peace and security. We call on the Council to protect the defenceless, to stand firmly on the side of international law, with a steady moral compass, and not to fall prey to the cynical narrative that is constantly dragging us to the brink of war and thwarting all efforts to find a just solution to this horrific injustice.

We totally reject that narrative driven by Israel, the occupying Power, which remains unrelenting in its attempts to obscure and distort the realities we face, repeatedly casting itself as the victim when it is in fact the occupier, aggressor and oppressor and has appointed itself judge, jury and executioner of the Palestinian people — international law and human rights be damned, and no less the authority and credibility of the Security Council.

It is our hope that such strong messages will reinforce the efforts under way to ensure a ceasefire for the sake of saving civilian lives and sparing our people further suffering and yet another month of Ramadan filled with anguish and despair. We hope that the ceasefire holds, and we commend the serious efforts of Egypt in that regard, in addition to its efforts on Palestinian reconciliation.

We appeal for conscience and reason to prevail. We cannot act as though further escalation and deterioration of the situation are inevitable; they are not. We must act to avert the worst-case scenarios, for the risks are immense.

The international community and, at the forefront, the Security Council, long ago created the tools and laws both to prevent and resolve conflict, as well as to ensure the protection of civilians. It is past high time to use those tools and to implement those laws when it comes to Palestine. The exceptionalism and impunity too long accorded to Israel must stop.

It is time to stop making excuses for why the time is not right or why it is not possible or convenient to act, while continually absolving Israel of its crimes and facilitating its evasion of accountability, when so many human lives are at stake, and indeed the existence of an entire nation is at stake. It is time for the Security Council to act to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people for as long as this illegal, abhorrent Israeli occupation continues and their rights continue to be violated, including the rights of our refugees.

The draft resolution that has been presented to Council members by our brothers in Kuwait, as the Arab representative on the Council, represents a modest, first step in that regard, and we urge everyone to support it. It is inexcusable for the international community to continue standing idly by, expressing only regret yet failing to act, even as the rights, safety, well-being and dignity of our people continue to be so grossly and systematically violated by what amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As many Council members have said, it is time to address the root causes and underlying issues of this situation, not just the symptoms or a few selective events. It has been repeatedly stated in these halls that the Palestine question remains a litmus test for the efficacy of international law and the international system's authority, and that the failure to justly resolve it remains a stain on the international conscience. It is time to right that historic wrong.

The harsh lessons of the past should have been learned by now. Proper redress that is just, comprehensive and lasting can be found only on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the long-standing international consensus; it cannot be detached from them in a politicized and biased manner.

We have been brought to this Chamber today precisely because of the constant mistake of detaching developments from the root causes and the reality of the existence of the Israeli occupation, dispossession and colonization of the Palestinian people and their land by the most forceful and repressive means, in grave breach of international law. That detachment is most often coupled with erroneous attempts, including malicious propaganda by Israel, to characterize the situation as

being one of terrorism, while completely twisting the facts and undermining efforts, including by concerned States and the United Nations, to address the many serious issues before us.

Accusations of a double standard when it comes to the question of Palestine, regrettably, are not new in this Chamber, and they will only be reinforced by the hypocrisy on display today, namely, bringing us here to address the recent Israeli air strikes and rocket attacks from Gaza when the grave events that preceded, and may follow, remain unaddressed as the Council continues to be paralysed, and therefore prevented from carrying out its esponsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

It is hard to understand the attempts for a reaction from the Council to yesterday's events, as if those events are somehow unrelated to those that preceded, including when three previous attempts, led again by our brothers from Kuwait, for an appropriate Council reaction to the killing, injuring and maiming of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli occupying forces were summarily blocked by one Council member.

Perhaps some have already forgotten the slaughter of unarmed Palestinian civilians, including innocent children, that was committed on 14 May — the same date as the provocative and unlawful transfer of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem. Perhaps they have forgotten that Israeli soldiers perched at Gaza's borders deliberately shot at peaceful protesters from hundreds of meters away, in a craven and punitive show of force that obviously intended to cause bodily harm and death and sow fear and terror among the population.

But we have not forgotten, and neither have the families who are today mourning, and will forever mourn, the 118 Palestinians killed, among them 15 children, since the Great March of Return protests began on 30 March. Nor has it been forgotten by the thousands who have been injured by the Israeli occupying forces. They number at least 13,000 civilians, including children, women, medics and journalists, among them thousands still in need of surgery and medical treatment, and hundreds who have been disabled for life.

They were pleading for their voices to be heard, their human rights to be respected and an end to the miserable isolation and desolation imposed on them by more than a decade of the Israeli blockade and wars and a dire humanitarian crisis that is worsening by the day. Yet Israel chose to silence them, as usual deciding to respond with a heavy hand by using lethal and indiscriminate force against thousands of peaceful civilian protesters and setting off another cycle of violence.

Our people have remained bravely steadfast and resilient in the face of all of that. But the suffocating Israeli blockade has depleted their coping capacities and intensified their despair. Their suffering endures in a multitude of agonizing ways, as they continue to be denied even the most basic life needs — a constant reminder of the occupation's cruelty and criminality. Do not minimize their suffering: it is deep, traumatic and unbearable. It is the incubator in which anger and bitterness fester and hopes diminish, especially among the youth, for a more peaceful and just future in the glaring absence of accountability and genuine remedies for their plight, including in the immediate term for an end to Israel's punitive and inhumane blockade.

That is the backdrop and context for recent developments. The events of the past days did not occur in a vacuum. The latest cycle of violence has been fuelled and incited by a series of Israeli acts of aggression and rhetoric, particularly from 30 March onwards, including the massacre on 14 May and the killing of three other Palestinians by Israeli forces on 28 May, just prior to yesterday's escalation.

We reiterate what has been repeatedly affirmed by the Palestinian leadership, including President Mahmoud Abbas: we do not condone and we reject and condemn all violence against civilians. International law must be respected by all and under all circumstances. I challenge those who have memories from 24 hours ago to repeat that same commitment of condemning the killing of all civilians from all sides for whatever reasons to also include the Palestinian civilians. We have no problem whatsoever with the application of international law to our situation, as long as it is applied evenly, fairly, consistently and judiciously at all times, not selectively and not as a means to exempt Israel from the law and absolve it of its crimes, while it manipulates the law to suit its distorted narrative and unlawful claims.

At the same time, we remain insistent that all people seek, and are entitled to, security. Israel cannot claim exclusivity to the right to security; the Palestinian people also have a right to security. We cannot be excluded from that. Only the Israelis currently have security and we have no right whatsoever to it. Security

should be for all, including the Palestinians. Attempts to justify illegal actions in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, under the pretext of security are totally unacceptable. Equally, we firmly reject attempts to frame that issue as one of terrorism. The lines should never be blurred between actions that can be taken by States to ensure security, as per the Charter and international law, on the one hand, and actions that are in violation of the law and fundamental human rights and constitute war crimes, on the other.

Faced with that reality, we will persist with our efforts to secure protection for the Palestinian people to ensure their safety and well-being, in accordance with international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law. We appeal to Council members to favourably consider the draft resolution now being negotiated, with the aim of addressing the protection needs of our occupied and besieged people.

While we continue our endeavours in that regard, alongside all of our efforts to realize justice and fulfil the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and freedom, we call on the Security Council to act, in line with its legal obligations, resolutions and commitments, to address the crisis and reinforce our faith in international law, including for the protection of the most vulnerable among us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing, as well as Ambassador Haley and the United States for calling for this emergency meeting of the Security Council. It is not often that the Council calls for an emergency meeting following a provocation by Hamas; today's meeting marks a concrete step in the right direction. But today we need action. The Council must act on the opportunity presented to it.

In response to the most severe attack by Hamas and Islamic Jihad since the 2014 Operation Protective Edge, the Security Council must take two decisive actions: the first is to condemn Hamas for its war crimes against Israelis and Palestinians, and the second is to adopt a resolution designating Hamas as a terrorist organization, exactly as it did with Al-Qaida and with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS).

Let us review the facts. Over the past 24 hours, Hamas and Islamic Jihad fired nearly 200 rockets and mortar shells from the Gaza Strip into nearby Israeli towns and villages. The terrorists began their attacks on Tuesday, just as parents were preparing their young children for the school day.

I will share with the Council a chilling example. During the assault, a mortar shell exploded in the yard of a kindergarten, damaging the structure. By sheer luck, the kindergarten was empty, and no one was hurt. But that attack was a war crime. The deliberate goal of the terrorists was to kill civilians.

We have warned the Council of Hamas's intentions time and again. We have explained the imminent danger posed by the coordinated and violent riots that Hamas has orchestrated along the security fence. The mob, incited and paid by Hamas, attempted to breach the fence by force, opened fire at our soldiers and detonated explosives. Hamas terrorists even set fire to the Kerem Shalom civilian border crossing, a crossing designated for food and humanitarian goods to enter Gaza.

The latest attacks of the past 24 hours — the firing of shells and rockets at our citizens and the destruction of major electricity infrastructure for Gaza — only confirm our countless warnings that Hamas not only seeks to instil fear in the hearts of Israelis, but that it could not care less about the Palestinians whom it controls in Gaza.

In response to these terror attacks, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have targeted Hamas and Islamic Jihad's terror infrastructure. We also destroyed the tenth Hamas terror attack tunnel uncovered in Gaza since October. The IDF destroyed that tunnel, which began in Gaza, wove through Egypt and ended right in southern Israel, near the Kerem Shalom civilian crossing. Like all of Hamas's terror tunnels, this one, too, was intended to infiltrate Israel and harm as many civilians as possible. But this terror tunnel also had a second purpose: to smuggle weapons weapons into Egypt from Gaza.

Iran's role in this latest unrest should not be ignored. It is Iranian money that is used to pay the Hamas rioters on the fence, and it is Iranian rockets that were fired at our towns. Just like in Syria and Lebanon, wherever there is terror and violence in our region, there is Iran. Hamas is no different. No matter which tactic it chooses, whether it is suicide bombers, rioters at the fence or rockets and missiles, when Hamas has the opportunity to harm innocent people, it does not hold back. That is its sickening ideology.

We have here a situation that is black and white. Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005, as I keep reminding the Council. Hamas took over the following year and since then has done nothing but terrorize Israel and prolong the suffering of the people of Gaza. Let us not forget either that Hamas continues to hold the bodies of two Israeli soldiers, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, and two Israeli civilians, Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed. We will not rest until they have returned home.

Let me remind the Council that the situation in Gaza today is the direct result of Hamas's refusal to renounce violence. Let me also remind it that the Quartet conditions, put forward by the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations, were very clear about the need to renounce violence as a means of achieving goals.

We have said it time and again: if there were no terror, there would be no restrictions, and it is the people of Gaza who would benefit most. Even today, when the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, advocates for civilian projects in Gaza, it is Hamas that destroys those prospects. It is Israel that attaches great importance to the international efforts to assist Gaza's economy and development.

Hamas destroys civilian infrastructure because it does not want the people of Gaza to live in peace. Hamas has carried out endless terror attacks against Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza, and the past 24 hours have been no different.

There is no moral equivalence; there is not even a question of morality. Some cynical members of the Council are circulating a shameful draft resolution that does not even mention Hamas. Look at the draft: the idea that Hamas's violence could be rewarded by a resolution condemning Israel is absurd.

Every member of the Council needs to ask itself how it could possibly support a draft resolution that condemns Israel but does not even mention Hamas once. Members should read the draft tonight; they are going to vote on it. Maybe they can help me find the word "Hamas" in it. How many times is Israel mentioned? Hamas, not even once. What hypocrisy.

If this body does not issue a clear condemnation of Hamas, it will raise the question of whether this body is capable of protecting innocent life against terror. The key step is to accept reality: that Hamas is a terrorist organization, nothing less. Terrorist organizations must be designated as such by the Security Council. Designating Hamas as a terrorist organization would enable the Council to sanction its leaders, its members and every person or entity with which it associates. It is a designation that would result in countless lives saved.

It is high time that the international community combat Hamas with the same tools and vigour that it uses against Al-Qaida and ISIS. Let me be clear: if Israeli children cannot sleep quietly at night, then the terrorists of Gaza will feel the might of the IDF. We will not allow anyone to harm our citizens, and we will do all that is necessary to defend them.

We ask the Security Council to have the courage and the moral clarity to take the following actions: condemn Hamas and designate it as a terrorist organization recognized by the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.